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from the contemplation of a world, to them too often full of sorrow and labour, to another, where sorrow and affliction shall find no admission, but where there shall be joys evermore, "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

Now there are various ways of bringing the matter before you, but I think I shall best succeed in the object I have in view, by first giving a slight sketch, it must be the very slightest, of the more ancient modes of conducting public worship from the earlier times, to that period when the present highly objectionable arrangement gained ground, and became permanently established.

Of the customs observed before the Christian era in the Jewish Synagogue, the traces are but few, little is positively known, but what little is known is opposed to the supposition that the accommodation for those who attended public worship was in any way limited to a chosen and selected number; certainly not according to our present notion, for we find, on referring to their most ancient writers, that there was a division in the congregation, the men sitting on one side, the women on the other, and we learn from our Saviour's severe rebuke to the Pharisees, that so far from its being a justifiable custom amongst the Jews to appropriate to themselves exclusively the best seats, such as were for instance in a better position, it was urged against them as a charge and rebuke, "Woe unto you Pharisees."

If again from the Jewish times, we proceed to

the habits of the early Christians, we find nothing whatever to justify the system of exclusiveness. On the contrary, we are told that the early Christians had all things in common. Now,—although it is obviously impossible in a more advanced state of civilized society, composed of vast masses of people, and not of small communities, like the first converts to the gospel, that there should be in all and every thing an actual community of goods,—still it is obvious that, if there is a community and equality in any thing, it is and should be in things connected with public worship, and more especially in Churches where all are equal and alike in the sight of God. And it is not necessary to do more than to refer to the passage in St. James, from whence my text is taken, to shew how fully the justice of that feeling was recognized in the apostolical age.

As we advance, still we find nothing to give weight to the system of exclusion; on the contrary, we find, on reference to the plan and arrangements of our most ancient religious edifices, accommodation provided for the public in general, without any other distinction than certain private chapels annexed to the churches, in which, built and endowed, as most, if not all of them were, by private individuals at their own sole expense, prescriptive rights were allowed, and private seats for the accommodation of the founders and their families were acknowledged. The ministers, indeed, and chief authorities in each Church were also provided with particular seats as officiating officers; but the rest of the space was open and free to all, at all hours and

on all occasions; and, when I allude to the opening of churches, let me quote, what has been well said by an eloquent and celebrated writer, "that there is no edifice so abounding in, not only such religious, but such patriotic feelings as a Church; it is the only roof under which, every class of a nation can assemble at one and the same time—the only spot which recalls feelingly and forcibly to our imaginations, not merely public events, but the secret thoughts, the close and inseparable connexion and associations between the higher and the humbler classes." A Church thus contemplated in all its bearings, appears to impress upon our minds the records of ages past and gone. It was, adds this writer, a pious custom of those who worshipped therein before us, and one well worthy of our imitation, to allow them at *all* times to be open to the public; there being so many moments, so many occasions, when we require such a refuge and asylum for those inward meditations and heart workings, which, while they benefit and strengthen the soul, and refresh it as it were with a sacred and solemn unction, seem especially to require that hallowed communing manifested in the outpouring of prayer in temples dedicated to its Creator's service.*

* The following lines are in beautiful accordance with this sentiment.

Why are our Churches shut with zealous care,
 Bolted and barred against our bosom's yearning,
 Save for the few short hours of Sabbath prayer,
 With the bell's tolling stately returning?
 Why are they shut?

But as religion became darkened and defiled by worldly prosperity, worldly mindedness, and individual selfishness; a change came over this spiritual and purer state of things. As abuses crept in, and selfishness prevailed, as worldly in unison with spiritual pride stifled these better feelings,—a change, I say, ensued, and we tread on the threshold of another and less satisfactory scene; and from, or about the middle of the century preceding the Reformation, we detect the earliest encroachments on public rights, by private influence and interference; and from that period, pews, or exclusive portions in a Church may be dated, and the course of their encroachment traced. It was not, however, till after the Reformation, when, on the dissolution and spoliation of ecclesiastical possessions, lands, long held for other purposes, became the property of private individuals, and pa-

Are there no sinners *in the churchless week*,
 Who wish to sanctify a vowed repentance?
 Are there no hearts bereft which fain would seek
 The only balm for death's unpitying sentence?
 Why are they shut?

Are there no poor, no wronged, no heirs of grief,
 No sick, who, when their strength or courage falters,
 Long for a moment's respite or relief,
 By kneeling at the God of mercy's altars?
 Why are they shut?

Are there no wicked whom, if tempted in,
 Some qualm of conscience, or devout suggestion,
 Might suddenly redeem from future sin?
 Oh, if there be, *how solemn is the question*,
 Why are they shut?

ishes and religious edifices fell to the patronage, and became the property of the laity, that the evil, assuming a more enlarged and decided form, rapidly spread itself over the length and breadth of our land, and soon so identified itself with our habits, that all sight of its original and monstrous injustice was well nigh lost. So accustomed indeed are we, in these our days, to look upon the system of pews as a right and possession, to which the wealthier may lay claim, that it is difficult to raise the veil from eyes accustomed from infancy to contemplate them under these aspects; and consider them as privileges annexed to certain classes, with which others have no right to interfere. But there is an illustration, an argument ready at hand, which has always appeared to me strong and unanswerable, one which I have often heard put, but never answered. It is this:—Supposing that till this our day, in these our times, our Churches—built (as they were) for the benefit of the many, and not for the few, for public and not merely private accommodation—had remained open for all, as originally intended; when to the surprise of every body, at some general meeting, (a vestry for instance,) one or two or more individuals in the parish, had insisted on their right to take possession of so much of this public property for their own sole and particular and exclusive use,—that they had boarded off in the best and most commanding position in the Church for their private occupation and convenience, so many square feet, and claimed them as their own,—What would the

other persons equally interested in the use of the sacred fabric say? What would the other members of that vestry think, at such an unheard of attack on public rights, and public property? There can be but one reply; common sense, common justice, every feeling of equity and religion would be roused into opposition to such an unprecedented proposal. And were such a proposal now, I repeat, for the first time made, in favour of a system to which custom has familiarized us; the proposer, there can be no doubt, would meet with general and just resistance from ninety-nine out of the hundred who witnessed his proceeding.

I have thus briefly given a slight outline of the progress of a system, which, when calmly considered, will, I am persuaded, be acknowledged to be an abuse which would never have been tolerated had it commenced in our times. A word only will I say on the arguments in favour of the exclusive rights of certain persons to particular portions of property, as public as a church. It is said, that it is desirable that families should worship together, and that nothing can be more gratifying, than to see parents, attended by their children, going up to the house of God together. Most true,—nothing can be more desirable, nothing more gratifying; and could there be pews sufficient in every church, for every family, the argument would be triumphant. But is it so? can it be so? and then the argument therefore limits itself to this. Is such a desirable object to be enjoyed by a few, at the expense of other parishioners for whom there is no

such provision? There may be some who will answer—yes, we claim and approve of the right. But can they, or can any impartial bystander shut his ears to the reply of those who are denied the same privilege? For let it be remembered, that there are others who, having the same claims, may have feelings on the subject as strong as ourselves.

Again, it may be said by some, “But we are richer or higher in position and rank of life. For us, then, accommodation ought to be exclusively afforded.” A word in answer. Do these wealthier claimants remember that the Church of England is called emphatically, and peculiarly, and proverbially, nay more, that it is in truth to be called the poor man’s Church? It might therefore be fairly argued that the poor man, and not the rich man, was the first claimant for this restricted privilege; at all events, none can, with an easy conscience, dare to assert, that for the accommodation of the wealthy, the poorer should be, if not altogether shut out, yet be limited to a smaller and too often an inconvenient and incommodious space.

I would solemnly appeal to those who now hear me, to a congregation of some of the most respected and respectable body of parishioners in this populous city, and to them I would say, “Compared with yours, where and what is the accommodation for the poor, who, more than ourselves, from their want of education, scanty means, or habits of life, more especially require all that the national Church of their country can afford them?” In what I have said,

I wish not to give offence, and I trust I have given none, but the cause is one of justice and equity, and as a Christian minister I have felt myself called upon to express my sentiments freely and candidly, for the case requires it; and if I mistake not from much that I have heard, and much that I have seen and witnessed, those sentiments will be responded to by many present. In fact, the request was made to me, that I would advocate the cause of a rearrangement of accommodation, and a substitution of commodious seats, in the benefits of which a great number might participate; and gladly did I comply with a request reflecting credit on the parochial authorities who made it, and so much in harmony with my own feelings on the subject. It is, too, doubly gratifying to find that an example has been set by several influential pewholders of sacrificing their present convenience in so praiseworthy a cause; and I feel persuaded, that if not immediately, the time is not far distant, when many may live to see this beautiful church still more beautiful, by throwing open wide its space, that all who have the right to enter may find a place in which to worship within its walls. I speak from experience. Yours will not be the first example by, I might almost say, some hundreds of churches and parishes in our land. In this Diocese I could specify a considerable number in which the experiment has been tried with more than anticipated success, and in which when tried, and not found wanting in the trial, the parishioners, even those who were at first startled, and opposed the suggested change, have

come round and acknowledged the benefits resulting. I could give the evidence of many of the clergy of this Diocese in favour; scarcely a month indeed passes without some glad tidings on the subject. I will read the testimony of one which reached me little more than a week ago, from a clergyman who had met with opposition when he proposed a change. He says, "When I last saw you, that is a few months since, I mentioned some difficulties arising from the opposition of certain dissatisfied individuals, but you will be pleased to hear that since the Church has been open seated they have all come back, and a good many Dissenters also; and I am not without hopes that a meeting-house, erected during the latter end of a former incumbency, will in a short time be permanently closed and turned to some other purpose." I would especially request you to observe that this clergyman speaks of actual open and entirely free seats, and not the simple re-arrangement, though still to be appropriated by the churchwardens, for which I am called upon to address you this afternoon. Now such a testimony is a volume in corroboration of what I have said, and if again, names of note and consequence were of weight, I could also give those of rank and wealth, who have not only removed their private pews, but set an example worthy of imitation, by occupying the open seats erected in their stead.

I regret, that time will not permit me to enlarge much more on this part of the subject, but

I trust I have said enough to convince you that I have not spoken unadvisedly or without corroborative evidence in favour of the cause I advocate. To your hands I commit it, to your sound and deliberate judgment I leave it. The seed is sowing, or rather sown, and the fruits are daily becoming more apparent. The alterations suggested by your parochial authorities, I have inspected and highly approve; and, again expressing the satisfaction I feel in coming forward on such an occasion, I must, in the position which I fill in this Diocese, express my sincere thanks to all concerned in suggesting alterations and changes which, there can be no question, will be beneficial, and reflect credit on the parochial authorities who have suggested them to the occupiers of those pews who have kindly consented to waive their own claims for the public good, and to the ministers of this church who will zealously and faithfully discharge the duty of personally superintending the proceedings.

One word more in conclusion, to remove any lurking fears or suspicions that any thing like an unjust, or too sudden, and rash an invasion of your accustomed rights is contemplated. What is contemplated is simply this, (I think it unnecessary to allude to some alterations in the position of the pulpit, desk, and altar-rails, as foreign to the most important point in view,) that the pews generally speaking shall be re-arranged, so as to render them more commodious to those who occupy them, and

capable at the same time of accommodating a large number, and that some others should be entirely removed.* But observe, that in these contemplated changes, the churchwardens in whom, under a higher authority, the appointments rest, are prepared to appropriate and secure seats to the utmost of their power to those who now occupy and have been accustomed so to do. But were they and you inclined to do more than this, and throw the whole Church open, I am prepared to say, from my own experience, and the testimony of others, that none of the fears and objections of those who advocate an exclusive system would be realized. For in no one case coming under my observation have I ever perceived the slightest intrusion from the humbler on the upper classes. Families have sat together as before, one class has not been incommoded by another, but by a sort of tacit understanding, each has placed himself in the position assigned by custom and respectful propriety, and harmony has been established in places, where, as I well know, from disputes and contests about pew rights, confusion, dissatisfaction, and an unaccommodating and unchristian bitterness have prevailed, and will continue to prevail as long as the present system of supposed exclusive pew rights exists, to keep up the

* Some of the parishioners have, I understand, suggested the introduction of chairs, instead of pews or benched seats. Much might be said in favour of their adoption, and although the plan may not possibly meet with the immediate approbation of all, the experiment is worthy of trial.

rankling spirit of animosity, frustrating the outspread of that harmony and social feeling which ought ever to animate a community professing one and the same faith.

THE END.

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